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THE CIA ON CAMPUS. 1969-1971

File Reveals 'Project Resistance' Operation at W&M

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The Central Intelligence

Agency conducted a covert information-gathering operation on the William and Mary campus in the late 1960s and early 1970s according to an agency file recently obtained by The Flat Hat. The file which the newspaper had sought for two years under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) shows that an unidentified informant made regular reports to the CIA on "dissident" activities and what he perceived as threatening radicalism at the College.

The CIA's activities here were part of PROJECT RESISTANCE (and a companion program, MERRIMAC), a national effort "to monitor extremist activity against the agency," explained an employee of the agency's Information and Privacy Division who asked to remain anonymous. The CIA feared that "someone was trying to overthrow the government" and that dissident student groups might be supported by Communists, he claimed. The employee conceded that in retrospect most student activism "did not pose a threat" to national security.

More specifically, PROJECT RESISTANCE aimed at "predicting violence or harassment that might affect agency recruiters on campus," said Cathy Pherson, an employee in CIA's public relations. This came in the aftermath of a 1968 bombing of the agency's recruiting office at the University of Michigan. Pherson said that the CIA acted under pressure from the White House and "if we're guilty of anything it's of following orders." She also noted that vague wording in the CIA Charter left some doubt as to what the agency could or could not legally do.

Such an explanation of the CIA presence is "far-fetched" responded J. Wilford Lambert, vice president of student affairs during the activist period. Lambert said that if he had known that a CIA informant operated on campus he would simply have told the agency "We are not aware of a need for your services."

The existence of the file vindicates several faculty members and student leaders who were scoffed at for believing that they were being watched.

"This is proof that even paranoids have enemies," commented Professor of History Edward Crapol as he examined a copy of the file. While almost no one contacted by The Flat Hat expressed disbelief at the CIA's

actions, Nancy Terrill, president of the SA in 1969-70 said that "the lack of surprise doesn't lessen the anger."

Substantial portions of the file (including one five-page general assessment of William and Mary) have been blacked out by the CIA. The agency claimed exemptions under the FOIA which permit the withholding of information related to national security and the protection of the CIA's sources and methods. In addition, names of suspect professors were withheld because their release would constitute "a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy."

CIA officials were reluctant to discuss the details of PROJECT RESISTANCE with The Flat Hat. The anonymous employee pointed out that the FOIA merely requires the agency to furnish documents, not to provide interpretations or draw inferences from the material.

The report estimated the 1970 radical population at William and Mary to include ten professors and less than 200 students out of a student body of 3,800. The activities of the campus "dissident" group SAM, Student Action Movement (which according to the informant had the active support of three or four "weirdo professors" along with tacit backing of others), are outlined for late 1969 and early 1970. "Attachments" to the CIA file include a warning about draft board strangulation, a list of demands made by students at

the College in a "peace action strike" which followed Kent State, and a letter from a Student Association president addressed to Dean Lambert.

Noteworthy events at the College in April 1970 were several fires (one set to a state-owned vehicle), "almost daily" telephone fire and bomb threats made to the College switchboard, verbal threats of use of bombings and Molotov cocktails received by the president, student pickets, and two sit-ins. Lambert seriously questioned the accuracy of the report, saying that he cannot recall several of the fires and that he "would have known about it if the switchboard had received daily threats."

Carson Barnes, former dean of students, and according to the file, "the center of resistance to the radical left," does remember that "several fires of a highly suspicious nature were set" and that the State Fire Marshal was called to investigate. However, he does not know whether two students apprehended in the case were known sympathizers of the dissidents.

The informant concluded his April 1970 analysis by predicting that "the College of William and Mary will undergo severe ferment and disorder in the coming year regardless of the national scene because the radical elements control most student functions." The Student Government Association and The Flat Hat were cited as major culprits.

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Nancy Terrill, described the precast as "amazing and ironic." Instead of a severe ferment, "a general malaise" took over the campus in the fall of 1970, she said. Students sensed that "nobody was listening, that we were going nowhere."

Winn Legerton, SA president 1970-1971, objected to the CIA's portrayal of student protests as part of a cohesive force when she saw them more as "individual actions in different groupings."

David Jones, professor of philosophy and by his own admission, probably one of the CIA's "weirdo professors," said that the "severe ferment" statement and the general threat mentality pervasive in the report indicate that the informant was trying to justify his salary. "The typical William and Mary protest was respectful and low-key (such as a silent peace vigil), in keeping with the conservative background of the students. In addition, Jones noted that student activism here was directed more at loosening women's curfews and dress codes than at protesting the Vietnam War."

An exception to this occurred in November 1969 when several students collected signatures on anti-war petitions at the Williamsburg Shopping Center. They were confronted by two barbers from Zuzma's barbershop who questioned their patriotism, then proceeded to hit them and tear up their petitions.

At one time during the dissident era, Jones, a member of the American Civil Liberties Union, suspected that his phone was tapped and that his mail was being opened. A friend on the police force advised him that "the spooks were after him."

Jones and other dissenters were almost certain that an intelligence agency was spying on campus, although at the time, most believed that it was the FBI or Army intelligence. They presumed that the CIA limited its activities to foreign countries, as is called for in its charter. Crapol says that "it was a standard joke at meetings — to try to figure out who the FBI man was."

Sometimes this was not difficult. Jones recalled one draft counseling session where a

man dressed in a grey suit with a pair of handcuffs partially hanging out of his pocket — sat in the back row. When asked to identify himself, the man neither spoke nor moved.

Jones started draft counseling on campus not as an attempt to force students to make a certain moral judgment on the war, but rather to "inform them of their rights and options under the Selective Service Act." Most people who came in sought some "gimmick in our bag of tricks" to defer them, Jones said. For example, some people would ask if their hemorrhoids would get them exempted.

Although Jones was already a tenured member of the faculty in the spring of 1969, his contract — along with one other faculty member's — was withheld because President Paschall felt that he may have unduly influenced a sophomore cadet to resign from ROTC. The contracts were issued after the faculty showed a decisive negative reaction to Paschall's tactic.

Other information contained in the file indicates that the CIA informant was a person closely connected with the College administration. Specifically, a copy of a May 1970 letter that SA President Legerton wrote to Lambert appeared with the CIA documents. The letter advised Lambert that several groups — including the Committee for a New Congress, the Draft Counseling Committee, and the Committee on Peace Action Coordination — would have access to the Student Association Office in the Campus Center over the summer.

Lambert strongly denied that he passed Legerton's letter to the CIA and noted that it could have been leaked by any of seven other administrators who also received copies. Barnes, one of the seven, believes that the letter was provided to the CIA by someone outside the administration who obtained a copy from Legerton.

Very few persons contacted by The Flat Hat could even remember the New Congress or Peace Action Committees mentioned in Legerton's letter. By contrast, the events of a "dorm-in" sponsored in November 1970 by SAM are vividly recalled. Female students visited in male dorms in defiance of College policy, and Barnes was given responsibility for dealing with the protest. Lambert said that the President had not consulted him regarding appropriate response to the "dorm-in" and that he had heard about it over the campus radio.

One sentence from the CIA report on the event commands special attention:

The informant said that females are prohibited by regulation from entering male dormitories and that during this visit in the various deans of the College had made inspections of the dormitories, identified persons involved and "cleared them out as we went along."

One possible reading of the sentence is that the "we" refers to the deans, that the informant was present during the dorm-in, and that he counted himself among the "we" of the sentence. The unidentified CIA official said that "a reasonable inference could be drawn that the informant was a dean or assistant dean at the College."

Crapol said that in view of Barnes's strong opposition to the liberalizing movement and his attacks on faculty and students one could make "a reasonable inference that it was Barnes himself." Other sources speculate that the informer may have been an assistant to Barnes.

Barnes denied that he had any contact with the CIA. He pointed out that the wording of the quotation does not represent typical language for a dean and more importantly that the information is inaccurate. Students were not actually cleared out, he said, but were read a statement informing them that they were violating college regulations and that they had ten minutes to comply, under pain of suspension.

The event stirred considerable community attention and Barnes incorporated it into an unusual analogy in a speech before the Williamsburg Kiwanis Club a few weeks later.

Last week you had head football coach Louis Holtz for your speaker. He had a losing record of 3-7 this season. Most of you know I suspended ten students about a month ago and all ten are still on campus. Therefore, I should remind you that my record is 0-10 so far and the season is not yet over.

Barnes went on to comment that the "inaccurate, unethical, and misleading" Flat Hat could get no worse "although it seeks to disprove this week by week."

The speech further alienated Barnes from the College community. Barnes said that in the end he "was given another job," as Director of the Office of Special Programs and that this "was probably a good thing." He maintained that he had been "thrust in the middle" between overly restrictive regulations and students who clamored for quick changes. He said that he "daily" felt as if he was doing someone else's dirty work in the often "arbitrary, capricious activity" of enforcing curfew rules.

Crapol however perceived Barnes not to be reluctantly enforcing severe social regulations but to be pursuing his job "with a good deal of vigor and enthusiasm."

Crapol said that it is "constructive" for The Flat Hat to "rake over the coals" and inform the college community of CIA activities such as PROJECT RESISTANCE. He declared that "spying or prying is an anathema" and pointed to "the paradox that an agency supposedly protecting our liberty is actually subverting it." Crapol is particularly disturbed at the file's presumption that "there is an orthodoxy, an accepted standard" to which every American should adhere.

He suggested that a good slogan for the "American Empire" would be that "the sun never sets on the activities of the CIA." Although the agency claims that PROJECT RESISTANCE was terminated in 1974, Crapol believes that the CIA "is still at the same games." He is worried about moves in Congress which he believes will restore greater

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power to the CIA and limit the number of Congressional committees with oversight responsibilities for the agency. Douglas Rendleman, professor of law at Marshall-Wythe School of Law also sees problems with S.2284, the Senate National Intelligence Act of 1980. Testifying before the Senate Select Committee on

Intelligence, he pointed out that the bill as currently written does not guarantee the integrity and independence of higher education and does not prohibit certain activities (such as covert information-gathering and covert recruitment) which clearly violate the moral standards of a university.

Crapol said that the idea of a CIA presence at William and Mary "grows more horrendous" the longer that one thinks about it, but he said that the informant himself is "a sad or rather pathetic figure."

Terrill simply said, "it sounds like Nixon."



Former Dean of Men Carson H. Barnes is shown above with other deans patrolling a men's dorm on the day of the 1970 'dorm in.' Barnes was described as "intelligent, capable, perceptive, and most importantly accurate" in the CIA summary of an anonymous informant's reports. Barnes denied knowledge of the CIA's activities.



Jacobson photo

Ed Crapol, Professor of History.



Jacobson photo

David Jones, Professor of Philosophy.

Professors Crapol and Jones were probably among the 10 professors identified as supporters of the radical left by the CIA file.



One of the biggest threats perceived by the CIA was the Student Action Movement (SAM) shown above at an infor